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UNCLAS TEL AVIV 001390

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
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CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

[1](#)1. Mideast

[1](#)2. Darfur

Key stories in the media:

All media reported that the Israeli reservists held by Hizbullah, Eldad Regev and Ehud Goldwasser, are set to be released after the cabinet approved an exchange deal yesterday. After five hours of tense debate, 22 ministers voted in favor of the deal and three --

Finance Minister Roni Bar-On, Justice Minister Daniel Friedmann, and Housing and Construction Minister Zeev Boim -- voted against it. In exchange for the captive soldiers, Israel will release jailed Lebanese terrorist Samir Kuntar, who murdered a Nahariya family in 1979, and four Hizbullah militants, the remains of Lebanese civilians and several dozen Palestinian prisoners. The media quoted PM Ehud Olmert as saying that "as far as is known" the two kidnapped soldiers are no longer alive. Ha'aretz quoted sources in Israel as saying that the swap would probably take place by July 12, which is when Hizbullah is planning a victory ceremony to mark the second anniversary of the Second Lebanon War, but Yediot reported that the deal will not be carried out on July 12. The media reported that Hamas expects good terms from Israel in the Gilad Shalit deal.

All media reported that. Barack Obama is planning a trip to the Middle East, including Israel, and Europe this summer. On Sunday The Jerusalem Post reported that Obama's visit is expected to take place before late August's Democratic Party Convention in Denver. The Jerusalem Post quoted Olmert's spokesman Mark Regev as saying on Saturday that Obama is a "very welcome visitor" and that Olmert "is looking forward to meeting the Senator."

The media reported that Israel opened the Gaza crossings yesterday, allowing truckloads of fuels and goods into the Strip.

Israel Radio and the leading Internet news service Ynet quoted a Persian Gulf paper as saying that a third round of talks aimed at completing discussion on issues raised in the previous round will take place in early July. Diplomatic sources were quoted as saying that there may be several rounds of indirect talks before Damascus decides whether to launch official negotiations or halt the talks.

Over the weekend leading media, citing a report in the conservative Iranian Jam e-Jam newspaper, reported that the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards warned that if his country is attacked, it will barrage Israel with missiles and seize control of the Strait of Hormuz, a key oil passage in the Persian Gulf. This morning electronic media quoted Iranian news agencies as saying that a Tehran court sentenced an Iranian man to death on charges of spying for Israel. The defendant, Ali Ashtari, 43, a Muslim who owns an electronics import business, was arrested about 18 months ago by Iranian Intelligence. Once the prosecution presented the court with various wiretapping equipment allegedly used by Ashtari in his espionage activities, he reportedly confessed, pled guilty on all charges, and expressed remorse for his actions

Leading media reported that yesterday the Petah Tikva District Court ruled against five IDF reservists suing actor and director Mohammed Bakri for slander in his film "Jenin, Jenin." Bakri's cinematic description of Operation Defensive Shield in 2002 alleged that IDF soldiers had committed war crimes. Judge Michal Nadav ruled that the film did in fact slander the soldiers; however, since the slander was directed against an entire group, individuals within this group did not have the right to file suit.

11. Mideast:

Summary:

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "What we must now ensure is that we emerge from [the cabinet's approval of the Hizbullah deal] stronger and better prepared for the battles ahead. And Hizbullah might want to remember that by taking on Israel -- even when we were admittedly not at our best -- it got far more than it bargained for."

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv: "Yesterday it was possible to stop the march of errors, which only encourages further kidnappings, which only harms human lives. This opportunity was not seized. Prepare for the next kidnapping."

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom: "Had it not been known that his intentions are good and his capacity poor, Olmert might have been described as

a sponsor of Iran's interests in the Middle East."

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The U.S. does not want a flare-up in Gaza for many good reasons, but one of these is the fear that a military escapade could end in mishap."

Block Quotes:

I. "The Cabinet Decides"

The conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (6/30): "This newspaper opposed the release of [Lebanese terrorist Samir] Kuntar for the remains of [Hizbullah abductees] Regev and Goldwasser because of the heinous nature of the crime he committed and because it will likely strengthen Nasrallah in his efforts to show Hizbullah's concerns transcend his own Shi'ite community (Kuntar is Druze and was a Palestine Liberation Front operative). We also opposed a trade because Kuntar has become an important symbol throughout the Arab world; because of previous government commitments made to the family of IAF navigator Ron Arad (missing since his plane went down over Lebanon in 1986) not to release Kuntar without a quid pro quo; and because trading Kuntar for the remains of two dead soldiers will likely complicate the price we will have to pay for the return of Gilad Shalit from the Gaza Strip.

This latter warning was echoed by the Mossad and Shin Bet, which opposed the deal. But the cabinet has spoken and its stance is supported by most Israelis, much of the media and IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi, who told the ministers that he feels himself responsible for all IDF soldiers -- the fallen included. All of us must now respect the decision. Israel's body politic has gone through a traumatic chapter. What we must now ensure is that we emerge from it stronger and better prepared for the battles ahead. And Hizbullah might want to remember that by taking on Israel -- even when we were admittedly not at our best -- it got far more than it bargained for."

II. "Prepare for the Next Kidnapping"

Op-Ed Page Editor Ben-Dror Yemini wrote on page one of the popular, pluralist Maariv (6/30): "The previous deals led to more kidnappings and more errors. This deal will encourage the next kidnappings, and that is known, clear and predictable. It is not clear what most of the public wanted, but it is clear that there was pressure, there were headlines and there were tears. This was expressed in a concentrated, exaggerated manner in the past week. Is that what should dictate the government's conduct? Is that what is called leadership? And even if we make the doubtful assumption that polls would have shown that most of the public supports the deal, so what? If the polls determined anything, then the government would have to be changed every other day. Olmert would have to go (and he has to go), and his successor would not last more than two months. For public opinion here, with or without headlines, with or without public hysteria, is no more than a seesaw. Yesterday on one side and tomorrow on the other. Is that a substitute for policy, principles, national interests, stability? It is customary for us to say that we are proud of our moral standards. They, the Arabs, don't care about human beings, and we do care. We 'do not forsake soldiers,' and therefore, 'we are prepared to pay any price'.... The facts indicate the opposite. They are the ones who do not forsake their murderers. They get out of prison en masse. They receive a hero's welcome. In general, we have become a bit confused. The rule of 'don't forsake soldiers' is certainly worthy. But there are other methods, besides the wholesale release of murderers. The methods are known. They entail risk. In the case of Entebbe, it worked. In the case of Nachshon Wachsman [a soldier abducted by Hamas and whose rescue failed] it ended differently. The creative and cunning mind of the past has disappeared, in favor of a whining attitude expressed in petitions and demonstrations. Yesterday it was possible to stop the march of errors, which only encourages further kidnappings, which only harms human lives. This opportunity was not seized. Prepare for the next kidnapping."

III. "A Mixture of Moral Turpitude and Folly"

Veteran journalist and anchor Dan Margalit wrote on page one of the independent Israel Hayom (6/30): "Olmert has been retreating from

Hassan Nasrallah. There is no reason for him to prevail and act properly just as the failed [Second] Lebanon War is coming to an end. He and his ministers deserve yesterday's decision -- moral turpitude mixed with folly. Had it not been known that his intentions are good and his capacity poor, Olmert might have been described as a sponsor of Iran's interests in the Middle East.... Before he started [talking with Hizbullah], he should have demanded signs of life; set as an iron rule that living terrorists not be exchanged for dead abductees ... and that Palestinians never be released in a deal with Hizbullah except in negotiations with Abu Mazen -- if at all."

IV. "Image Still under Renovation"

Washington correspondent Shmuel Rosner wrote in the independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (6/30): "There are those who claim that Israel's strategic importance has increased since the war, and that the Americans, too, despite their disappointment, realize this. The challenges, topped by the ongoing wrestling with the growing power of Iran, have not gone away. The theory of an 'axis of moderates' versus an 'axis of extremists' took on a clearer shape in the course of the Second Lebanon War, and has been further clarified since then. Except that this axis has no head.... Whom will the Americans be able to count on if not Israel? Thus, a few months ago, the U.S. and Israel agreed on a long-term defense package of unprecedented generosity. Still, it would have been easier for [the Americans] to count on Israel without the dispiriting shadow of that war and its outcome. The U.S. does not want a flare-up in Gaza for many good reasons, but one of these is the fear that a military escapade could end in mishap. The 34 days of that war two years ago tested the world's nerves. The U.S. gave Israel more time to enable a definitive victory. Despite everything Israel has managed to regain since then, one thing remains unchanged: Next time it will have a hard time getting an extension."

12. Darfur:

Summary:

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "Darfur and its refugees are like an alarm bell for the collective conscience, and that bell is supposed to ring also when non-Jews are suffering."

Block Quotes:

"Darfur Is Our Problem, Too"

The independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized (6/30): "On Saturday, the Egyptians shot a 7-year-old girl from Sudan who tried to cross the border from Egypt to Israel just south of Rafah. Had she and her family made it through, they would have surely landed in [the Negev's] Ketziot Prison. The 'new policy' that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's cabinet declared vis-a-vis asylum seekers is, in fact, cruelty by any other name.... Too soon we have forgotten the suffering that is the lot of the persecuted. Perhaps we have grown accustomed to concern ourselves only with our own plight after absorbing Jewish refugees since the founding of the state. Today, when we are more prosperous, when the reservoir of Jewish refugees has dried up, there is fortunately no reason to scan the globe for people who could be considered Jewish and coax them to come here. And there is no reason to remain indifferent to the suffering of non-Jews who could contribute to the State of Israel as much as any Jew. Darfur and its refugees are like an alarm bell for the collective conscience, and that bell is supposed to ring also when non-Jews are suffering."

JONES